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IDENTITY WORK, SWIFT TRUST AND GENDER: THE ROLE OF WOMEN-ONLY LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES

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Introduction

This chapter explores the role of gender in shaping women's entrepreneurial leader identity. We conceptualise entrepreneurial leaders "as individuals who, through an understanding of themselves and the contexts in which they work, act on and shape opportunities that create value for their organizations, their stakeholders, and the wider society (Greenberg, McKone-Sweet and Wilson, 2011:2). The enactment of entrepreneurial leadership is a complex process which is known as identity work (Watson, 2009). In essence, identity, which is concerned with an individual's attitudes, beliefs and behaviours, provides entrepreneurial leaders with a source of meaning from which to operate (Day and Harrison, 2007). However, many small business leaders fail to see themselves as leaders (Anderson and Gold, 2009). This can be exacerbated for women entrepreneurial leaders, as the gendering of the dominant entrepreneurship discourse assumes a male entrepreneurial identity (Bruni, Gherardi and Poggio, 2004; Hamilton, 2013).

Acquiring and maintaining an identity is not a one-off event but instead can be learnt and practiced over the course of an individual's career and lifetime (O'Connell, 2014), through the process of identity work. Identity work is an activity that reflexive subjects undertake in the attempt to be deemed legitimate within the various environments they encounter (Marlow and McAdam, 2012). It is a dynamic and iterative process that is enacted within situated contexts and shaped by the characteristics of those involved (Svenningsson and Alvesson 2003). Seeking and claiming legitimacy pivots upon successful identity work, as only by convincing the dominant referent group of 'fit' can an individual be deemed credible. As part of achieving credibility as an entrepreneurial leader, individuals can take actions to inform their sense of self as a leader, including participation on leadership development programmes (Carroll and Levy, 2010). However, while increasing attention has been paid to the construct of identity in entrepreneurship (Nevis and Glynn, 2011), very few studies have investigated the process of identity work (see Watson, 2009; Philips, Tracey and Karra, 2013 for exceptions), even though the entrepreneurial context provides a rich opportunity for identity creation and interpretation.

Despite increasing policy initiatives and interventions, there remains a shortage of women entrepreneurs in general and women entrepreneurial leaders in particular (Brush, Balachandra, Davis and Greene 2014). More recently, the economic crises and the leadership crises have led to calls for radically new approaches to gender in business (Wittenberg-Cox, 2013). The gender gap at senior levels tends to be attributed to structural and attitudinal barriers (Ely and Rhode, 2010; Ely, Ibarra and Kolb, 2011). Referred to as second-generation gender bias, these are so subtle, deep-rooted and covert that we are unconscious of their pervasiveness and influence on beliefs and behaviours (Kandola, 2009). Furthermore, these are often perpetuated as men continue to dominate leadership positions, ensuring that organizational structures, processes and practices are biased towards assumptions and behaviours potentially more suited to men. Structural barriers which women face in

organizations include under-representation in traditional structures of organizational power (Ely, 1995; Ridgeway, 1993), which can lead to limited access to informational networks (Ibarra, 1992). Furthermore, women tend to face the incompatibility of caring and domestic responsibilities with dominant forms of working including inflexible working hours, often associated with career progression (Ely and Rhode, 2010). Women's perceptions of themselves, rooted in traditional gender expectations and practices, also contributes to the gender gap (Ely and Rhode, 2010). One means of overcoming these invisible but pervasive forms of gender bias is through building and enhancing women leaders' identity and subsequent leadership capability. Recently, Ely et al. (2011) have called for a new leadership development agenda for women-only, with a specific focus on identity work, in an attempt to overcome the biases women experience that can impede the development of their leader identity. This is a timely call for entrepreneurial women leaders, who are generally underrepresented, marginalised, often isolated, lacking role models and with little opportunity to share their experiences (Fielden and Dawe, 2004; Hamilton, 2006; Stead, 2014). Women entrepreneurial leadership development programmes, thus, provide women with an environment within which to explore the factors they potentially face. There is, however, very little research specifically on identity formation in the context of women-only leadership development programmes (Harrison, Leitch and McAdam, 2015).

While a recent McKinsey report has highlighted a mixed response to women-only leadership development programmes (Devillard, Graven, Lawson, Paradise and Sancier-Sultan, 2012), nevertheless such courses have endured and evolved over the last 35 years (Vinnicombe, Moore and Anderson, 2013). Indeed, in response to the leadership talent crisis and the diversity agenda, an increasing number of well-known and highly regarded US and European institutions now offer women-only leadership development (Ely et al., 2011). Although leadership development is a costly and high-profile human resources activity (Mabey and Finch-Lees, 2008: 3) there remain a number of unanswered and undiscovered questions (Mabey, 2013; Day, Fleenor, Atwater, Sturm and McKee, 2014). In particular, coherent and theoretically informed approaches shaping the development, operation and impact of women leadership are lacking (Ely et al., 2011). This chapter addresses these limitations and offers a deeper theoretical understanding and more reflective consideration of entrepreneurial leadership development. We do this by exploring the factors that influence women in the shaping, developing and revising of their leader identity through participation on a women's leadership programme.

The chapter is structured as follows. In the next section, we review the nature and impact of women's leadership development programmes on identity development. We then outline the research design and approach adopted in this exploratory study. The presentation of the analysis and results is in two stages: first, we identify a number of themes associated with the design of and participation in women-only leadership development programmes, including building confidence, the approach to programme design and leadership skills development; and, second, we identify a number of new themes emerging from the reflexive experience of participants, notably the role of the programme as an arena for identity work through leadership development, and the creation of a shared safe space in which self-reflection and personal development can occur. In the final section of the chapter, we draw on the literature on swift trust to provide a theoretical grounding for our analysis and identify implications for practice in the design and delivery of women's leadership development programmes in an entrepreneurial context.

The contributions of the chapter are threefold. First, we provide insights into how entrepreneurial leadership identity is formed, shaped and maintained. Second, we advance gender theorising by exploring the role of gender in the design, delivery and impact of leadership development. Specifically, we employ the concept of swift trust (Meyerson, Weick and Kramer, 1996) to explain the emergence of a shared safe space in a leadership development setting. Finally, from a practitioner viewpoint, we inform the design and development of future leadership development programmes for entrepreneurial leaders.

Leadership Development Programmes

Perspectives on addressing women's leadership development tend to take three main approaches (Ely et al., 2011). First, there is what Martin and Meyerson (1998: 312) have termed the "add-women-and-stir" approach, where women and men attend the same courses because it is assumed that gender does not impact on leadership development. However, this does not take in to consideration the gendering of leadership development. For instance, Sinclair (1995; 1997) has argued that MBA courses are based on a masculinised set of practices that reinforce male dominance. This is manifested in the centralization of authority and power in the educational space, the refusal to admit uncertainty, the focus on best practice instead of personal experience and the emphasis on analytical techniques at the expense of intuition and emotion. Ignoring the importance of socially aware learning in leadership learning and development activities can be problematic as it assumes that leadership, management and learning are neutral processes (Ramsey, 2005: 223). Such an assumption downplays the role which social context and social conditions play in the learning environment including the impact of gender, race and class (Brooke, Pedler and Burgoyne, 2012; Ram and Trehan, 2010). Even if differences are acknowledged, attempting to neutralise them is unrealistic and counterproductive as it serves only to reinforce the dominant group (Reynolds and Trehan, 2003).

Second, there is the "fix-the-women" approach, which while acknowledging that gender is an issue adopts the view that women have not been socialised appropriately to compete in a man's world and thus need to be provided with the tools and skills to better equip them to do so (Ely and Meyerson, 2000). Third, there is what we call the "ourselves-alone" mindset that acknowledges that there are a number of issues in the workplace, such as power and politics, sexuality, sex differences in working approaches, stress, and the nature of career development which specifically concern women and are, therefore, best addressed in a women-only environment (Vinnicombe and Colwill, 1995). As such, Vinnicombe et al. (2013) advocate that any women's development programme must take into account both sex-related differences found in relation to leadership and the gender dynamics that, irrespective of size, shape most organizations' culture and the subsequent impact this can have on how women feel valued. Such courses provide women with an opportunity to reflect on and reinterpret their managerial experiences with other women in similar positions and to celebrate differences rather than being defensive about them (Vinnicombe and Singh, 2003). In particular, it helps women leaders make sense of how gender operates in everyday business practice (Stead and Elliot, 2009). Nevertheless, a tension exists here, in that while many women feel positive after attending a women-only programme, others especially younger women, also shun them for fear of being stigmatized (Vinnicombe et al., 2013: 408).

Given this, entrepreneurial leadership development has to take into consideration the immediate local context in which women leaders find themselves and "the broad social context that dictates gender roles, cultural norms and expected behaviours" (Bierema, 2001:

56). In the remainder of this chapter, we examine what resources and capabilities may be impacted by the single sex environment in terms of programme design and participants' networking behaviours within that. We also consider from whom women seek legitimacy, explore the extent to which segregation can create challenges, and consider the manner in which single-sex training can facilitate or hinder women's identity work and we draw out the implications for research and practice.

Research Context and Approach

In framing this chapter, we have argued that as reflexive individuals, people draw upon available discourses to make sense of and enact with reality (Watson, 2011). When referring to discourses, we follow Kelan (2009: 68) who argues that these are not comprised of just linguistic narratives but include, 'spoken, written and acted texts'. Given the exploratory nature of this pilot study, we adopted an interpretivist stance in order to gain understanding of the nuances of how identity is shaped, formed and maintained (Case, 2003; Weick, 2007). As a consequence, we acknowledge the importance of issues such as those of social construction, researcher interpretation, and narrative/discursive framing without denying that there are realities which exist in the social world (Watson, 2011). By making use of such a perspective, this study is distanced from any ambition to create a grand narrative that suggests universal dimensions of order, but rather, aims to explore the multiplicity of complexities and contradictions that shapes situated experience and activity (Boyce, 1996).

Our sample was drawn from the first cohort of participants on a women-only leadership development programme, the first of its kind in the region, and its designers and deliverers/facilitators (Ruth and Bonnie). All participants were employed at middle or senior manager level in their organizations. Each was afforded a pseudonym to preserve anonymity. At this point, it would be expected that some discussion of the ideal sample size is necessary to offer detailed illustration of the key elements of the analytical framing. However, this is somewhat redundant as there were four participants, with only two (Anita and June), both of whom had entrepreneurial experience and/or intentions, agreeing to contribute to the study and discuss their experiences of identity work and leadership development. Although a small sample, the wealth of contextualized material generated accords with the rationale of interpretive pilot research regarding theory development where thick description and contextualized scripts are conceptually embedded in analytical frames.

Detailed empirical material was generated from an exploration of the experiences and insights of participants via semi-structured interviews. The interviews, which lasted approximately two hours, were tape-recorded and transcribed. The interviewing schedules framed guided conversations - the stories which emerged however, were freely narrated responses, the questions acting to direct recollections and explorations around the key themes of identity work and leadership development. Following Boje (1991), the researcher acted as an informed listener attempting to 'get the story straight' but at the same time, encouraging the discussion towards the analytical underpinnings of the study. Whilst the point of detailed, qualitative enquiry is to elicit depth and detail, this presents challenges in drawing out salient issues and ordering the material generated. To address this issue, we began the analysis by reading through transcripts and identifying and comparing initial concepts and grouping them into provisional categories (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). We then sought to identify ways in which these categories related to each other and the key themes within our framing analysis (Locke, 1996; Strauss and Corbin, 1998). This process is not linear but rather develops through a dialogue between the researchers and the respondents. A 'recursive, process-

oriented, analytic procedure' emerges (Locke, 1996: 240), drawing out key theoretical relationships. This process resulted in the following stories which are made up of the strands that emerged from the data and reflect the key themes in the literature. To present a coherent analysis of the findings as outlined below, each theme is explored in detail illustrated with fragments of the narrative (Pratt, 2009).

Programme Origin and Design

The original genesis for the development of the programme resulted from Ruth's role as the only female management consultant in a local leadership and management development consultancy. During the 1990s she designed and facilitated open-access, generic leadership courses and observed that women tended to be under-represented. As a result, she decided to develop a women-only course. Initial background research revealed that while women were technically competent comparatively few advanced to senior management positions due to a lack of confidence and self-selected non-mobility. The latter, Ruth attributed to women being promoted to middle management levels in the organization and deciding that the additional responsibilities and pressures which might result were incommensurate with any extra remuneration which they might receive. This resonates with preference theory (Hakim, 2000; 2006), which was the first attempt to explain women's behaviour and choices between family, work and market work, especially for those living in progressive, affluent and liberal modern societies.

Developed in recognition of the male bias in existing economic and sociological theory of labour market participation which primarily referenced male labour market participation and men's work-life histories, it predicts diversity in work-lifestyle choices for three groups of women: home-centered women, adaptive women who combine work and family and work-centered women. Recent research confirms that there are fewer women in senior leadership positions than men as a result of family commitments (Opportunity Now, 2014). Despite legislation and policy initiatives, traditional organizational structures and expectations evident in hegemonic or greedy careers (Hakim, 2006) can be all consuming especially at senior levels. Course development was also informed by Simmon's (1996) work on the benefits of building an inclusive organization which he believed was hindered by gender conditioning leading many managers to build barriers preventing all employees from being fully involved. One means to overcome this, he suggested, was by eliminating institutional discrimination and prejudice. The initial course was scoped in conjunction with Michael Simmons and while it has subsequently evolved its basic premises remain. Three main elements provided the foundations of the programme, building confidence, creating context and the development of leadership skills and behaviours, and these are interwoven throughout its structure.

Building confidence. Fundamental to the programme's design was the desire to build participants' confidence, based on exploring their leadership journeys. At the outset, the initial focus is at the individual level and aims to get women to connect with positive aspects about themselves, for example by asking them who their hero/ heroine has been and how they have been a heroine. Ruth believes this is a powerful exercise as women rarely acknowledge the heroic efforts that they have made in their career journeys to date. In so doing, the emphasis is on women accessing who they are and being encouraged to own their style and strengths: in other words identity work. The initial session also addresses the ways in which women and men are socialized and the subsequent impact of this. The dominant messages explored for women include looking nice, taking a backseat, taking care of people, not putting themselves first and not being aggressive. On the other hand, men are taught from an

early age not to show weakness or to cry and from adolescence not to be close to other men which can mean result in them being disconnected from their feelings (Simmons, 1996). The premise of this element of the course is to highlight to the women that men's attitudes and behaviours to leadership can be also limited by stereotypical attitudes.

Creating context. While building confidence is the micro-foundation of the programme design establishing the business case for women's participation in senior leadership positions provided its macro-context. This is based on the recognition that the barriers to career progression that women face are systemic and are not to do with personal attributes or characteristics. In particular, Ruth advocates the value of the business case for increased involvement of women in senior leadership positions predicated on economic and social factors such as talent management, succession planning, competition for the best people and the need to address the skills shortage. She strongly believes that equality should exist for both men and women and that it is important to have men as allies, *"someone said to me one time, to break the glass ceiling it's better that somebody drops a brick on it from above. So that is why I think you need senior men and others who sponsor good talent to come through. Rather than women bouncing up and down, you know trying to hit with their heads"* (Ruth).

Leadership skills and behaviours. A key element in programme design was the belief in the importance of women managing their careers (goals and expectations) and obtaining skills and experience across a range of functions. This in turn was based on the view that women stay in jobs as a result of loyalty compounded by the fact that their leader, frequently male, may be reluctant to promote them as they have come to rely on them. This is a key structural cause and consequence of the glass ceiling phenomenon: *"you get women that settle in a job in middle-management in their mid-40s and they stay there and they block that job for 20 years. And younger people coming up can't get through, there's no mobility, there's no exit...."* (Ruth). The alternative, central to the rationale for and positioning of the programme, is that *"they need to be moving, you know, even if I'm happy that XXX has been in a job for ten years and she's great in that job, that's all the more reason to move her. It'll keep her fresh, keep her learning and actually keeps the energy in the organization going"* (Ruth). All of this, of course, raises issues of agency through women lacking energy, time and focus, their ability to handle criticism, to grant permission to protect themselves, stand up for oneself and to take risks. These are universal, not ad personam issues: *"I think, whenever women realize it's not about me, this is universal, this happens to everyone and now I realize actually I can take action. Whereas, where I think I'm the deficit, I have to fix me, then it's harder"* (Ruth).

An interactive and experiential format with a high commitment to peer-learning was adopted and care was taken to create safe spaces for learning. The programme has been designed to be flexible, built around three one-day sessions with coaching slots in between. The one-on-one, coaching sessions are based on the feedback and issues arising from the application of a 360-degree, feedback assessment using a specially designed instrument, which attempts to obtain objective feedback and evidence of participants' abilities. Reflecting on participants' reactions to the programme design and structure, Bonnie highlighted three key issues. First, the rapport between participants occurred much more rapidly than she had previously experienced in either male-only or mixed programmes: *"...it felt like the intimacy and the connection was there a lot faster for the women... People were very, very open and obviously felt safe enough that they could expose [themselves]"*. Second, the engagement with the learning opportunities that the programme afforded: *"And they come in and they're quickly into it. Men are different, you know, much [less engaged]"*. This, Bonnie attributed to the

women being at a non-mobility career threshold and having selectively chosen to come on the programme; in other words, they were heavily invested emotionally and instrumentally in it and what it represents. Third, the role of networking on and through the programme, and in particular the importance of developing weak not strong ties with shallow wide relationships, in which issues of reciprocity (Leitch, Harrison and Hill 2015) and determining one's business value plays a central role (Cross and Parker, 2004). Despite the small numbers Bonnie considered the programme to be have achieved, and potentially exceeded, its aims: *"...in that if we were measuring impact it was very successful"*.

Participant Leadership Development and Identity Work

Using the leadership programme as a contextual backdrop to analyse the process of gendered identity work in the search for entrepreneurial leadership identity enables us draw these constructs together and to contribute to contemporary debates. To explore how the participants arrived at the decision to enrol on the programme, we asked them initially to reflect upon the background to this and the factors that had fuelled their pursuit of leadership development identity work. Having established their motivations, we then focused specifically upon their recent experience of this particular women-only programme to gain a sense of how this had influenced and shaped the enactment of their leadership identity and its effects upon leadership legitimacy and credibility. From the analysis of the findings, three critical themes emerged with related sub-themes: first, identity and identity work enacted as a gendered performance; second, leadership development as a specific type of identity work; and finally, enablers of the enactment of identity work which included shared safe space, swift trust and self-reflection. To illustrate these themes, we now describe fragments of the narrative accounts shared by the respondents.

Identity and identity work (enacted as a gendered performance).

The programme provided the opportunity for the women to take time out and invest in their identity work. Indeed, enrolling on the leadership programme was the first time that the participants had consciously thought about working on their identity as a leader. Three specific issues emerged: time and space for reflection, the solitary nature of women in leadership positions including a lack of role models, and issues of leadership style and gender.

First, Anita wanted to participate in the programme as *"I very much work on my own"*. In addition to this, she wanted skills to help her to work with external stakeholders and to gain structure, guidance and reassurance in planning her career. *"I wanted formal support and mechanisms to put together a plan to steer my future"* (Anita). Indeed, taking time out (away from the normal working day and also normal physical environs) was important for both women, with June referring to the leadership course as defining in the sense that *"I started treating my leadership and my leadership role seriously"*. Second, the solitary nature of being a woman in a leadership position was emphasized, which was exacerbated by a lack of female role models *"there are very, very few females who I have met throughout my career who became my role models"* (June). Added to this, was the women's awareness of the importance of network development in relation to their leadership development *"developing networks on a really, really high level, and maintaining those networks is crucial"* (June).

Third, the impact of different styles of leadership and the influence of gender on shaping forming and maintaining leader identity was highlighted. The participants referred to the concept of servant leadership (Greenleaf, 2002), of *"being the facilitator behind the scenes,*

not only doing the work but also influencing the decisions while, to some extent, men take the ownership” (June). This prompted a wider reflection on gender and leadership style, reflecting more general discussions of the so-called feminisation of leadership in the twenty-first century (Fletcher, 2004): *“Definitely there are different styles. I think that there are gender differences and we are motivated and driven differently... [I’m] not pretending that it’s all generic, so I think the first thing we have to do is acknowledge that there are gender differences”* (June). In part, this is an outcome of a more self-effacing leadership style: *“Women lead the way from behind the scenes”* (Anita). However, there is a downside to this, as observed by June in that *“women have to be more chameleon-like, in adjusting to the mood of the group, to facilitate”*.

Leadership development (as a specific type of identity work).

Given these observations, the programme participants reflected more specifically on the link between leadership development activities and their identity. This was the first time that either participant had opted for a women-only programme but given where both were at with regards their own leadership development journey they felt that it was essential: *“other programmes, would normally be dominated by males therefore if they’re dominated by males there would be always be a certain take on things”* (June). Reflecting concerns that mixed-sex programmes, especially those where men dominated, could be intimidating and competitive environments, our respondents expressed concerns about the extent to which they would be able to participate in, and benefit from, such a programme: *“Men can potentially be overpowering and can take over and I was concerned that I wouldn’t get an opportunity to talk or participate about what I needed to”* (Anita). This in part reflected their experience-based beliefs about male participative styles: *“Men are better talking about what they have done even if they haven’t done it. Women are more likely to ground their talk in experience”* (Anita). However, in a mixed group this grounded talk was less likely to be articulated, especially in circumstances where the participant felt unease or discomfort: *“Within the first hour we were propelled into something uncomfortable – I didn’t know what to say. However, once the other participants started to talk about their experiences, I could see similarities and started to relax”* (Anita). There is, in other words, a very real sense of a women-only leadership programme being seen as a protected supportive arena in which issues of leader identity could be explored freely and openly.

Enablers of the enactment of identity work

(Shared Safe Space and Swift Trust). The programme provided an environment away from the women’s working careers, and it became clear that this evolved into a shared safe space as the women started to exchange experiences. This sharing was aided by the structure of the programme: *“So I think it was nice to be in an environment or to network with other female leaders and to see what challenges other female leaders experience”* (June). The consequence of the programme design was that both participants *“felt more at ease and relaxed than with mixed programmes”* (Anita), with *“good participation with all of the women, easy to relate to each other, good dynamics from the outset, sharing similar experiences”* (Anita). This was notwithstanding the challenges of participation: *“The first day I was out of my comfort zone, a very emotional day, though I felt reassured at the end of it”* (Anita). As an opportunity to explore one’s leader identity three observations can be made. First, the women reported a very positive experience of the benefits of participating in a women-only leadership development programme in comparison with prior experience on mixed-sex ones. Second, the participants acknowledged that the programme provided an environment that was a shared safe space allowing them to be vulnerable and to explore issues of personal significance. Third, the rapid development of sharing relationships within

the programme demonstrates many of the characteristics of swift trust (Meyerson et al 1996), an issue to which we develop below.

Self-reflection. Given the programme provided a shared safe space within which trustful relations could develop swiftly, it is unsurprising that the opportunity for self-reflection was a major benefit identified by participants: *“I think that is what we’re all missing in life - self-reflection, which was the most defining thing for me, actually to stop and to think where I am, where I want to be. It’s so simple but not always obvious”* (June). However, while it was recognised that the programme played a role in encouraging reflection, the common consensus amongst the women was that this reflection needed to be facilitated as *“if I sat at home or went for a walk and started thinking, well that’s one thing, but having a little bit of structure, a little framework, it’s important. Yes, having the framework was probably the key thing for me”* (June). This is consistent with the findings of prior research into entrepreneurial leadership (Leitch, McMullan and Harrison 2013) and investment decision-making (Harrison, Mason and Dibben, 1996) which identified that the coordinator or facilitator of a network, group or leadership development programme cohort plays a critical role in brokering the rapid development of trust relationships.

Personal development. One of the most evident outcomes of participation on the programme was the change in leadership style, moving away from the servant leadership expressed at the outset to a more assertive, less self-effacing style: *“I think this was one of the key things I took away, that it’s no longer about serving and the idea of servant leadership and facilitating. No, now it’s time for me to lead, it’s time for me to take charge”* (June). In other words, *“I’m moving now from being a facilitator and servant leader to being a leader”* (June). This reflects increased confidence, in terms of both the participants' self-confidence and in the increased confidence placed in them by others: *“I have the confidence to say no now – interestingly people accept it, my boss has commented on this a couple of times recently”* (Anita). This confidence is reflected in a greater willingness to demonstrate leadership and to seek out further opportunities for leadership development: *“I now need recognition and to promote myself, step out from the shadows “The course provided me with evidence that I had some leadership skills and how to get to the next level” “At meetings I now ask questions – I now want people to remember me so I asks questions. I always had something to say but was afraid to say it”*(Anita). For both women, the overarching benefit of participation in a women-only leadership development programme was the development of a stronger sense of leader identity: *“Instead of seeking approval, I am much more direct and prepared to take the consequences afterwards which is a radical transformation”* (Anita); *“So I don’t have to struggle anymore to prove myself”* (June)

Discussion

This research confirms the findings of other studies of the importance of creating a shared safe space for women to work on their leadership (Vinnicombe et al., 2013) which is best achieved by helping women to make sense of their work experiences in a positive way (Ely et al., 2011). Our analysis demonstrates that creating this shared safe space and thereby enabling participants to feel comfortable enough to take psychological risks with one another by, for example, exposing vulnerabilities and frailties, seeking support and feedback and voicing problems, requires trust to be established. Indeed, trust has long been acknowledged as a critical component in learning (Finnigan and Daly, 2012). Creating a trustful learning environment can reduce uncertainty and vulnerability and increase the depth of exchanges between participants. For Hosking (2014: 2-3) when we talk about trust ‘we are talking of

our feelings about the future ... [and] ... time, place, and social context are crucial to the trust assumptions on which we base all our thoughts and actions’.

Trust is a complex construct, conceptualized in multiple ways in a variety of disciplines (Goel and Karri, 2006). Despite the multiplicity of definitions, it is generally associated with expectations of fair play, acceptance of the rights and interests of other, ideas of joint undertaking and a level of shared understanding of the rules of engagement and behaviour in a particular situation (Kasper-Fuehrer and Ashkanasy, 2001). Early studies of trust focused on long-term relationships as it was believed that trust was built incrementally and accumulated over time. In other words, it was history dependent (Meyerson et al, 1996). An example of this tradition is Lewicki and Bunker’s (1995; 1996) three-stage model in which they identify different types of trust emerging at different stages of group development. In this perspective, trust is based on interpersonal relationships (Lewicki, Tomlinson and Gillespie 2006). Calculus-based trust forms between individuals during the initial stage of a relationship and is based on the assessment of the outcomes of creating and sustaining the relationship vis-à-vis the costs of severing it. This tends to be the most common form of trust in a business relationship (Harrison et al., 1996). For groups that interact productively over a longer period of time calculus-based trust is transformed into knowledge-based trust. This is grounded in individuals’ knowledge of each other’s behaviours which permits them to make predictions about it, thus, reducing uncertainty. Identity-based trust is the final stage and occurs when individuals have a high degree of identification with each other’s wishes and intentions, to such an extent that they are willing to act and substitute for each other. As Driver (2015:2) points out, identity-based trust is considered to be the strongest form of trust on the basis that more identification leads to more trust (Terrior and Ashforth, 2002; Henderson and Gilding, 2004; Maguire and Phillips, 2008; Van der Zee et al., 2009; Zhang and Huxham, 2009).

In considering the relationship between trust and identity work, Driver (2015), building on Li (2011), argues that trust is a complex socially constructed, linguistic and ultimately elusive phenomenon. Identification, therefore, is never just an interpersonal phenomenon, concerning those persons involved in a trustful relationship, but also one that is socially constructed as a discursive linguistic construction. Specifically, people draw on trust discourse not only to validate their identities but also to feel validated. Thus, this trust discourse is necessarily integral to all attempts to narrate the self in an authentic and real manner. In short, the plurivocal narrative of identity construction and identity work (Hamilton 2014) is, and has to be researched also, as a narrative of the discourse of trust which is a “fragile and temporary accomplishment aimed at stability but often under construction” (Driver 2015: 19).

However, this recent extension of trust theory to identity work, as with much of the existing corpus of work, does not have a well worked-out account of how trust develops in time constrained circumstances. With increasing globalization, changes in technology and the practice of using short-term and virtual project teams, attention has shifted to the development of high levels of initial trust in reduced time frames. Reflecting this, an alternative strand of research has developed in which interpersonal relations are given less prominence. Meyerson et al. (1996) proposed the term swift trust to explain the emergence of trust in situations where individuals have a limited history of working together and limited prospects of working together in the future - in this case a leadership development programme. Swift trust develops based on the knowledge and understanding of one’s own capabilities (which of course might not be a realistic assessment) and the expected capabilities of others.

In entrepreneurship, the construct of trust has been explored primarily in the context of access to finance and lending decisions, including the relationships between entrepreneurs and banks (Howorth and Moro, 2006), entrepreneurs and business angel investors (Bammens and Collewaert, 2014; Mitteness, Baucus and Sudek, 2012; Ding, Au and Chiang, 2014; Harrison, et al., 1996), entrepreneurs and venture capitalists (Strätling, Wijbenga and Dietz, 2011), and in the processes of deal making (Scarborough, Swan and Amaeshi, 2013) and informal lending (Umoren, 2003). However, trust and in particular swift trust has not been used as a means of explaining the emergence of a non-competitive and supportive environment. Based on our research, we suggest that leadership development programmes may be conceived as a temporary situation in which swift trust rather than time-dependent identification based trust has to develop. Swift trust needs to be resilient enough to survive the life of a temporary group “there is quite literally, neither the time nor the opportunity in a temporary group for the sort of experience necessary for thicker [i.e. stronger] forms of trust to emerge” (Meyerson et al., 1996: 181). In such circumstances, a central indication of mutual trusting behaviour is seen in the willingness to co-operate or share personal information with a degree of vulnerability.

Leadership development programmes are essentially time-constrained, characterised by a number of untested interpersonal relationships and by conditions of uncertainty. On commencing a programme, participants have to decide to what extent they wish to share insights and information about themselves and to which they can place their confidence and trust in others. They do so on the basis of an expectation that others will not take advantage of the situation and cause unnecessary harm, by entering “a state involving confident positive expectations about another’s motives with respect to oneself in situations entailing risk” (Boon and Holmes, 1991: 194). This requires the establishment of a cooperative, non-competitive environment in which each individual’s willingness to be vulnerable to another is based on the confidence that the latter party is benevolent, reliable, competent, honest and open (Cummings and Bromley, 1996; Hoy and Tschamen-Moran, 2003; Daly and Finningan, 2010). In this, and an extension of the original Meyerson et al. (1996) formulation, the role of the facilitator is important in creating an environment that allows trust to develop in relationships between others (Harrison et al 1996; Leitch et al. 2012). This is typified by the creation of a temporary organization as the basis for managing human social interaction through the establishment of clear expectations and responsibilities for all participants, and the establishment of learning/ psychological contract. In a time-constrained environment it is the facilitation of a swift trust-based, shared safe-space which results in a high quality learning process, individual change and the generation of the desired outcomes for all.

Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to explore the role of gender in shaping women’s entrepreneurial leader identity. This research makes both a theoretical and a practical contribution to the field of entrepreneurial leadership development. First, we provide insights into how entrepreneurial leadership identity is formed, shaped and maintained. Second, we advance gender theorising by exploring the role of gender in the design, delivery and impact of leadership development activities. Specifically, we employ the concept of swift trust (Meyerson, et al 1996) to explain the emergence of a shared safe space in a leadership development setting. In this area, from a practitioner viewpoint, we illustrate the need to understand and enhance developmental processes as opposed to concentrating on leadership per se (Day et al. 2014) and, in so doing pay more attention to pedagogy and the role of the facilitator (Ely et al. 2011).

This means that future research into identity work and gender in entrepreneurial leadership development should be concerned with investigating how individuals might be facilitated in constructing their leader identity and their subsequent enactment of leadership. In other words, the focus should be on what leaders do as opposed to who they are. As a result, ways in which gender bias issues might be addressed can be examined. We have argued here that within the shared safe space of a women-only leadership development programme, trust is necessarily implicated in all individual attempts to narrate the self through language. Trust, therefore, in this view, is intimately connected to identity work, which itself is the ongoing process of creating and recreating identity, that fragile and fleeting accomplishment which is an ongoing narrative construction that is plurivocal and co-performed (Sermijn, Devlieger and Loots 2008; Driver 2015). However, this is not to conclude that single-sex environments are the only ones in which this is achieved. Rather, they form an appropriate, but not exclusive, part of a mix of experiences for the development of entrepreneurial leader identity. Our research participants, both programme designers/facilitators and programme participants, recognize that single-sex environments provide a necessary shared safe space in which to share and expose one's vulnerabilities and frailties in a way that would not happen in other more masculinist contexts. They also recognize that this provides a foundation from which an identity can be formed and/or developed, a narrative can be crafted around that identity, and legitimacy sought from one another as self-confidence is developed, as the basis for the practice of entrepreneurial identity in other, non-single sex, situations.

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